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NEGATIVE
BURN
EDVIN BIUKOVIC
BRIAN BOLLAND
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ROB WALTON
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illustrated by Christopher Moeller

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Design Studio
IRON EMPIRES: PART X
ART & STORY BY MAULWERF BRÜDER DESIGN STUDIO
KEVIN MOELLER - WORDS
CHRIS MOELLER - PICTURES
IRON EMPIRES
I WAS BORN ON MITO, OUT IN VINKANSE PREFECT. AS A PLANET, IT HAD ITS MOMENTS, BUT IT WAS SO DAMN CROWDED. I JOINED TAGER'S FREE CORPS JUST TO GET OUT.
THEY WERE SUCH A BUNCH OF PORKHEADS THOUGH. I DUCKED OUT AFTER A YEAR: STOLE A LITTLE CUTTER ON MIDWAY AND NEVER LOOKED BACK.
YOU'RE A LONG WAY FROM HOME, THEN.
YEAH, A LONG, LONG WAY.
FEELS GOOD THOUGH.

THEY'D BEEN HARRASSING ME. I COULDN'T STAND IT. SEEMED LIKE THEY'D NEVER SEEN A WOMAN SOLDIER BEFORE.
I MADE IT TO THE DARIKAHN BORDER BEFORE I REALIZED I *WASN'T ALONE.*
ONE OF THE BOYS HAD FOLLOWED ME. HE'D *HAD IT OUT FOR ME* FROM THE START. HIS NAME WAS *CREASE.*
LINIEA PHAES, TURN THAT PRETTY ASS OF YOURS AROUND AND *FOLLOW ME HOME* OR YOU'VE *HAD IT.*
TAIL ME ANY *FURTHER,* CREASE, AND I'LL MAKE SURE *YOU'LL REGRET IT.*
I'VE HAD IT WITH YOU AND *YOUR FATBACK OUTFIT.*
EEEE
HE FIRED A *WARNING SHOT* AT ME. THAT WAS THE *LAST MISTAKE* HE *EVER MADE.*
KRANG
KAO KAO

I GUESS THIS IS MY HOME NOW, AS MUCH AS ANY OTHER PLACE. THOUGH I'D JUST AS SOON FIND A PLACE THAT'S NOT AT WAR. I'M SICK OF IT.
COME ON! VEE GO NOW. GOT GOOD JOURNEY AHEAD OF US.
VEE COMING TO A PLACE IN THE HILLS WHERE THERE IS ONLY ONE EASY PLACE TO GO THROUGH. DAT'S WHERE THE OUTPOST IS AT.
DARE IT IS. VEE GOTS TO BE SPECIALLY CAREFUL NOW.

HERE'S VAT VEE GOING TO DO, BRUDDA! VEE GOING TO BUST OUR WAY IN AND SHTEAL DAT DEK-WAGEN!
HUSH, BRUDDA! VEE GOT DAT LIDDLE GIRL NOW! SHTUPID!
OH YEAH, RIGHT, BRUDDA. SORRY. VOT VEE GOING TO DO DEN?
VEE GOING TO SNEAK IN VEN IT'S NIGHTTIME AND GET THROUGH VIT NO TROUBLE.
VEE GOING THROUGH LIKE DA CREEPING SCHNAKES, BRUDDA?
JUSS LIKE PAPA TAUGHT US.
WHATCHU THINK, GHAZAR?
WELL, IF THERE'S NO OTHER WAY...
NO UDDER WAY OUT OF DA LOWLANDS, GHAZAR.
SOLCHURS ALL OVAH DA LOWLANDS.
JOU SHOULD NEVER HAFF COME DOWN HERE WITH LIDDLE GIRL.
KSH

COME ON! VEE GO TROO HERE!
RIPPP
HOW LONG ARE WE GOING TO BE INSIDE HERE?
NOT TOO LONG NOW. VEE MOVE THROUGH LIKE A BREEZE.
HE NEEDS TO CAN THE POETRY AND GET US THE HELL OUT OF HERE. THIS IS CRAZY.
HE'LL GET US THROUGH.
DEY CAN HEAR US IF DEY WANT, BUT DEY CAN NEVER SEE US.
WHAT THE--

GREAT GUTS!
HISSS!
BRRRRT!
KRUNCH

RIPPP
COME ON NOW, JOU RUN QVICK, GHAZAR!
RPPPPP
WHAM
FOLLOW ME!
WHAM
RIPPP
POK
POK

GNNNNA
DAT DEK-WAGEN ISS COMING, BRUDDA! VEE LIKE TOADS DOWN A HOLE!
LIKE LEAVES, GHAZAR! COME ON...
I'VE NEVER HEARD OF A "DEK-WAGEN." MUST BE A KERRN THING.
WHATEVER IT'S CALLED, ITS AUTOCANNON IS LOADED WITH HYPERVELOCITY SABOT ROUNDS.
BRUDDA, VEE GOT TO PROTECT DEES PEOPLE.
VEE FLOAT LIKE LEAVES THEN, BRUDDA!
DAT'S GOOD ADVICE, BRUDDA! VEE DO DAT!
RAK RAK RAK
RAK RAK
NO TIME NOW, GHAZAR, JOU GIFF ME LIDDLE GIRL!
UNCLE!
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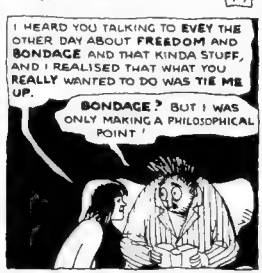
To Be Concluded in Issue #43

A PHILOSOPHICAL POINT

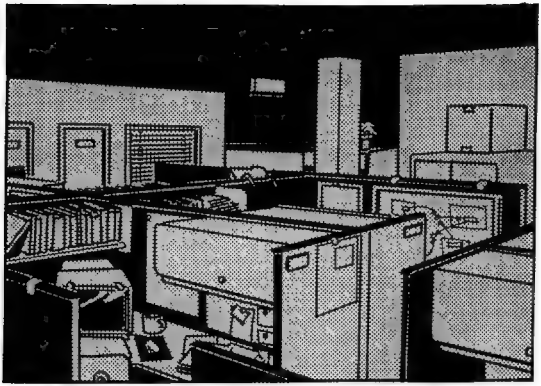
7 4 89 BOLLAND 44

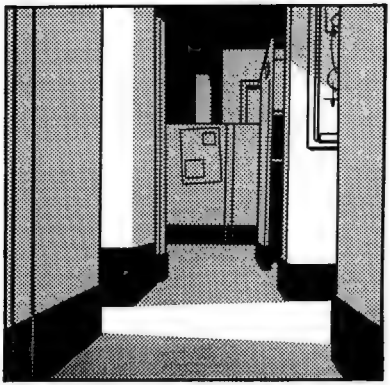

I HEARD YOU TALKING TO EVEY THE OTHER DAY ABOUT FREEDOM AND BONDAGE AND THAT KINDA STUFF, AND I REALISED THAT WHAT YOU REALLY WANTED TO DO WAS TIE ME UP.
BONDAGE? BUT I WAS ONLY MAKING A PHILOSOPHICAL POINT!

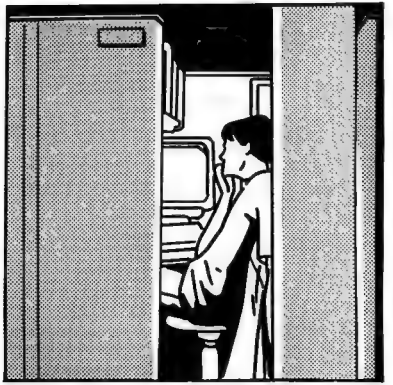
YOUR MIND IS CLOTHED IN PURITANISM AND PSEUDO SUB-INTELLECTUAL FLUMMERY. I'VE STRIPPED ALL THAT ROUGHLY ASIDE AND TO ME YOU'RE AS NAKED AS A BABE..

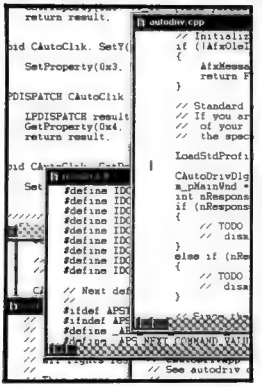
Cubicle Rut

©1996 Stephen Cheng







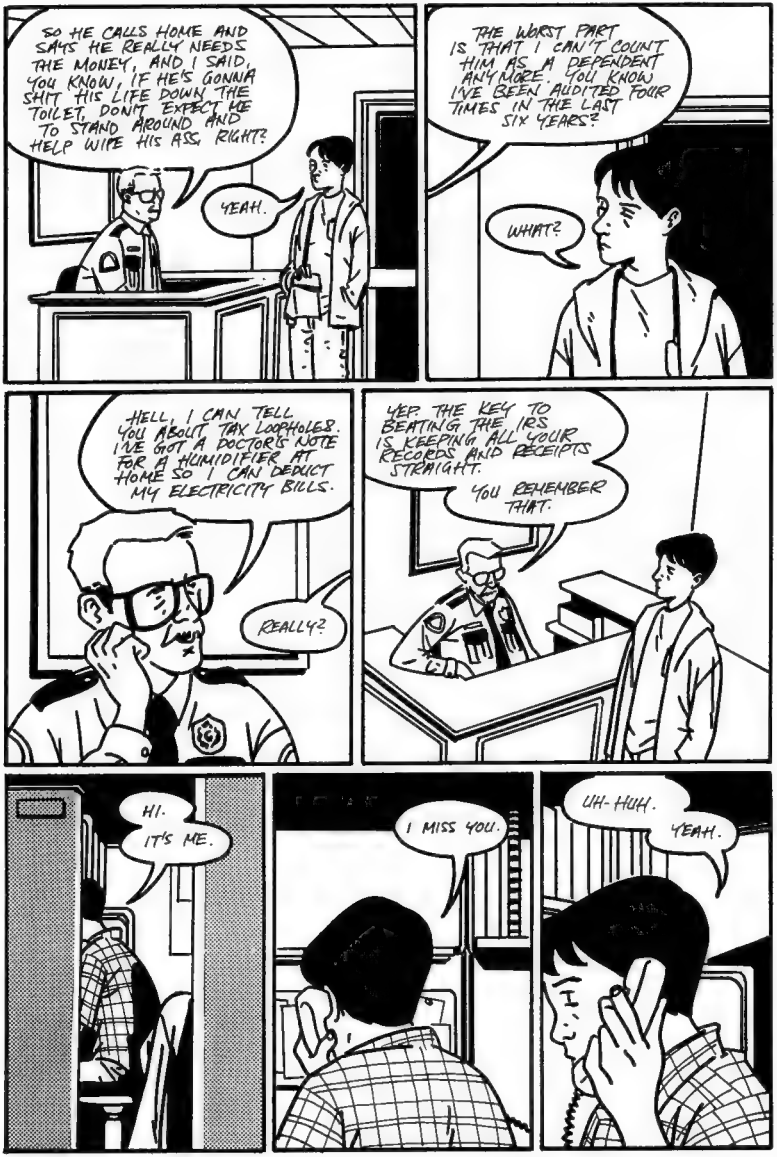


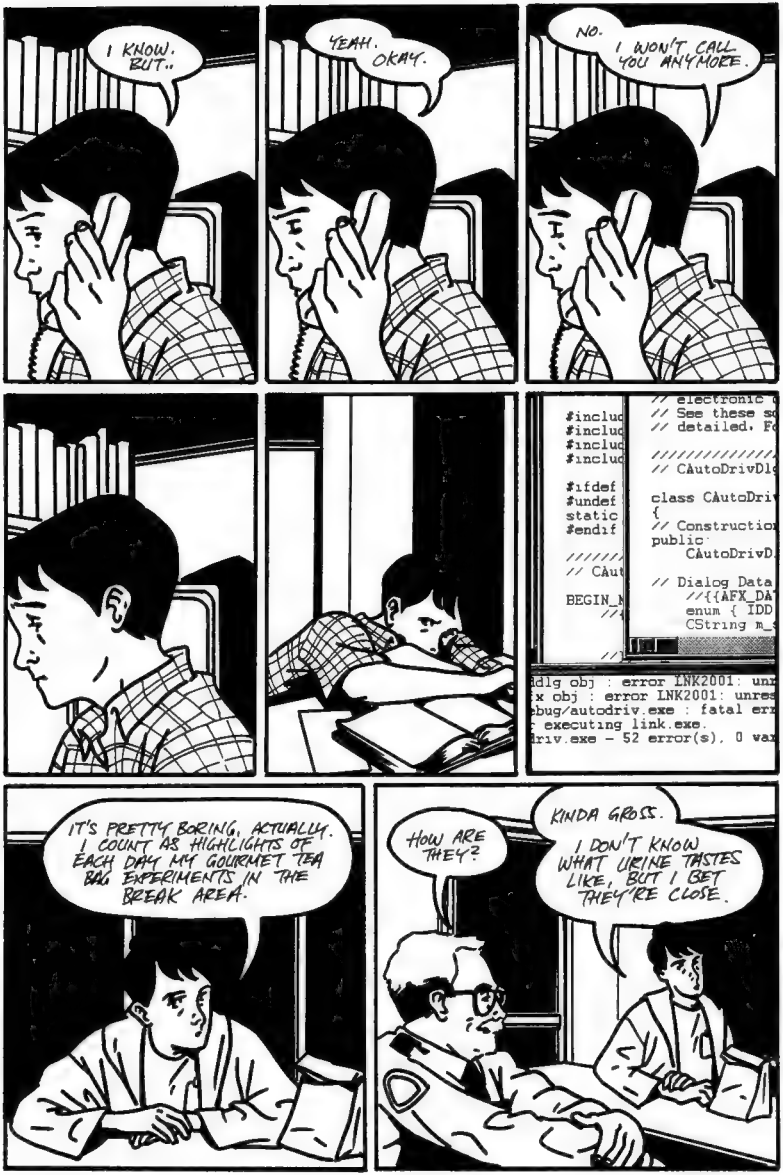
WHOA THERE, BUD. WHERE'S YOUR BADGE?
IT'S AT HOME..
HOW DID YOU GET IN THIS MORNING?
SHE LET ME IN. THE WOMAN THAT WORKS HERE IN THE MORNING.
THAT SEXY LITTLE THING?
I DON'T KNOW. I HADN'T NOTICED.
SHE SHOULD'VE SIGNED YOU IN FOR A VISITOR'S BADGE.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
SEAN. MARTINEZ.
MARTINEZ. THAT'S MEXICAN, AIN'T IT?
IT'S HISPANIC, YES.
OKAY. YOU CHECK OUT.
YOU KNOW, MY DAUGHTER MARRIED A MEXICAN. PAIN IN THE ASS 'COS I CAN'T FIND BURRITO-FLAVORED BABY FORMULA.
MY SON, THOUGH. HE MARRIED A WHITE GIRL.
OOPS. I MEANT "KNOCKED UP" A WHITE GIRL.
HEH.
I'M REALLY HUNGRY. I GOTTA GO GRAB SOMETHING TO EAT.
OKAY. NOTHING FOR ME, THANKS.
SEE YOU LATER.

SMELLS GOOD.
YEAH.
RING!
HELLO..?
HEY. IT'S BOB AT THE SECURITY DESK. I'M GOING OFF DUTY NOW. DON'T FORGET TO BRING YOUR BADGE TOMORROW.
YEAH. OKAY.

'SCUSE ME.
...
BYE.

I WORKED AS A MACHINIST FOR WESTINGHOUSE FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS.
AND THEY LAID ME OFF. THOSE CORPORATE BASTARDS.
THIS JOB WAS ALL I COULD FIND. NOBODY ELSE WOULD HIRE ME 'COS I'M OVER-QUALIFIED FOR ALL THE OTHER JOBS.
OH.
WHAT DO YOU DO HERE? YOU ONE OF THEM PROGRAMMERS?
SORT OF. KIND OF A SUMMER JOB KIND OF THING. YOU KNOW. TUITION.
IT'S NO BIG DEAL.
TELL YOU WHAT. IF I'D GONE TO COLLEGE, I WOULDN'T BE SITTING HERE BITCHING ABOUT MY JOB, THAT'S FOR SURE.
THE WIFE WOULDN'T BE BITCHING ABOUT MY JOB, EITHER.
YEAH. WELL..
HEY, SEAN. WE'RE ALL GOING TO LUNCH. WHY DON'T YOU COME WITH US?
UM.. I'VE MADE PLANS. THANKS FOR ASKING, THOUGH.
OKAY. MAYBE NEXT TIME.


SO HE CALLS HOME AND SAYS HE REALLY NEEDS THE MONEY, AND I SAID, YOU KNOW, IF HE'S GONNA SHIT HIS LIFE DOWN THE TOILET, DON'T EXPECT ME TO STAND AROUND AND HELP WIPE HIS ASS, RIGHT?
YEAH.
THE WORST PART IS THAT I CAN'T COUNT HIM AS A DEPENDENT ANYMORE. YOU KNOW I'VE BEEN AUDITED FOUR TIMES IN THE LAST SIX YEARS?
WHAT?
HELL, I CAN TELL YOU ABOUT TAX LOOPHOLES. I'VE GOT A DOCTOR'S NOTE FOR A HUMIDIFIER AT HOME SO I CAN DEDUCT MY ELECTRICITY BILLS.
REALLY?
YEP. THE KEY TO BEATING THE IRS IS KEEPING ALL YOUR RECORDS AND RECEIPTS STRAIGHT.
YOU REMEMBER THAT.
HI. IT'S ME.
I MISS YOU.
UH-HUH.
YEAH.


I KNOW. BUT..
YEAH. OKAY.
NO. I WON'T CALL YOU ANYMORE.
IT'S PRETTY BORING, ACTUALLY. I COUNT AS HIGHLIGHTS OF EACH DAY MY GOURMET TEA BAG EXPERIMENTS IN THE BREAK AREA.
HOW ARE THEY?
KINDA GROSS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT URINE TASTES LIKE, BUT I GET THEY'RE CLOSE.

AND I SPEND ALL DAY IN THAT LITTLE 8×6 CUBICLE. THAT'S ONLY 3 SQUARE FEET LARGER THAN THE STATE PENITENTIARY.
YEAH?
DOUGLAS COPELAND CALLS CUBICLES "VEAL-FATTENING PENS," YOU KNOW.
IS HE THAT DILBERT GUY?
AND I'M REALLY WORRIED THAT I'M NOT GOING TO GET ALL THIS WORK DONE BEFORE THE SUMMER'S OVER.
IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HERE THIS LATE EVERY NIGHT?
I HAVE TO GET IT DONE..
I KNOW. AND YOU'RE DOING YOUR BEST, AIN'T CHA?
YEAH..

THEN WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
WHAT PROBLEM?
LISTEN, SEAN. NONE OF THIS MEANS ANYTHING.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THIS. ALL OF THIS. THE CUBE, THE TEA BAGS, ALL OF THIS. THEY DON'T MEAN ANYTHING.
NONE OF THIS MATTERS.
IF YOU'RE LUCKY, THEY LET YOU STICK AROUND A FEW YEARS. BUT WHEN THEY FEEL LIKE IT, THEY STAB YOU IN THE BACK AND TOSS YOU OUT IN THE STREET.
THEY DON'T OWN YOU, SEAN. A YOUNG FELLOW LIKE YOU SHOULDN'T BE LOCKED UP IN AN 8x6 CUBICLE ON A FRIDAY NIGHT.
DON'T YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO DO? DON'T YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND OR SOMETHING?
HOW IS THAT YOUR BUSINESS?
HEY, I'M JUST SAYING THAT YOU S
LOOK, I GOTTA GO. I GOT A LOT OF WORK TO DO.
NOW HANG ON A MINUTE..
EIGHTEEN YEARS OF MY LIFE, SEAN. YOU THINK THEY GAVE A SHIT?
SEAN?
SEAN!

DID YOU ENJOY YOUR LUNCH?
YEAH. THANKS.
I NEED SOMETHING TO SOMETHING MICROWAVABLE..

HEY, SEAN!
HEY. WHAT'S GOING ON?
I'M QUITTING! GOT ANOTHER SECURITY JOB AT A CAR DEALERSHIP. GET TO SIT IN AN OFFICE AND WATCH SECURITY CAMERAS ALL NIGHT. MAYBE PUSH AN ALARM BUTTON OR TWO.
YEAH?
YEP. IT'S A SMALL STEP UP, BETTER PAY, A LITTLE COMFIER, AND LESS BITCHING FROM THE WIFE.
THAT'S GOOD.
IT IS. AND FOR ONCE I'M WALKING AWAY FROM THEM.
HEY, THANKS FOR HANGING OUT WITH ME. IT GETS SO THAT YOU'D KILL FOR SOMEONE TO TALK TO, YOU KNOW?
DON'T MENTION IT.
WELL. I SHOULD PROBABLY GET ON WITH LUNCH.
OKAY. NOTHING FOR ME, THANKS.
GROWL.
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, SEAN.

IS THERE A LOT LEFT TO DO?
NO. IT'S PRETTY MUCH DONE. JUST CLEAN-UPS AND SOME SMALL FIXES LEFT.
OKAY. THE NEW GUY'S COMING IN NEXT WEEK. IF YOU WALK HIM THROUGH THE CODE, HE CAN TAKE OVER.
YEAH. I'M SURE HE CAN.
GOOD LUCK AT SCHOOL, SEAN. THANKS FOR THE HARD WORK.
DON'T MENTION IT.
HI..
HI.
I'M SEAN.
I KNOW.

MIME STORY

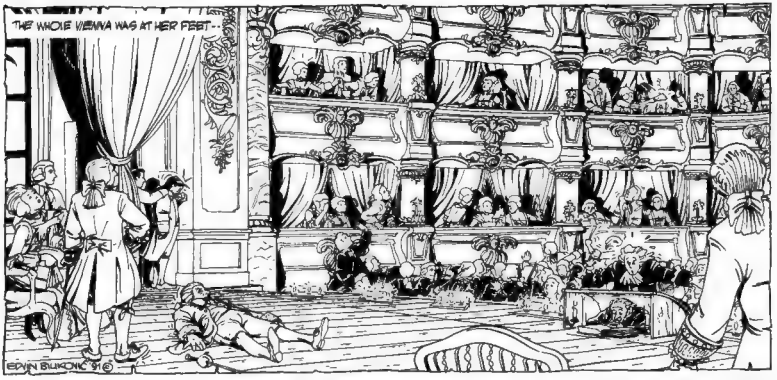
KUHN & QUEST 9.96

THE IMMORTALS
RRUMBLE!
TOK
EDVIN BUKOVIC '91
ROST!
BELLOST!
IT HUNG THERE FOR TWO HUNDRED YEARS NOW WHAT?
ALLOW ME. MY NAME IS LUDWIG VON LUDGENLAUS! ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE WHEREABOUTS OF SEBASTIAN VON SCHWINDELSCHWEIN'S DESCENDANTS?
CERTAINLY I'M ONE!
I APOLOGIZE FOR BURSTING IN LIKE THIS...
THINK NOTHING OF IT! CAN I HELP YOU?
STORY: DARKO MACAN ART: EDVIN BUKOVIC'

DIE THEN!
UGH! W-WAIT A SEC--
MAY I KNOW WHY I'M BEING STRANGLED?
ACH, WE... HEAR THE STORY I KNOW OH SO WELL!
SEBASTIAN AND I WERE TIED BY OUR COMMON GOAL - THE ETERNAL LIFE! ALAS, THE LONG YEARS OF LABOR BROUGHT US NO SUCCESS--
UNTIL, IN A FLURY OF INSPIRATION, WE STUMBLED UPON THE RIGHT WAY!
EVAN DORKIN '91
WE TESTED OUR ELIXIR OF LIFE ON A MAVELY, THE CREATURE THAT KNOWS NO TOMORROW--
AND--
--IT WORKED!
OUR JOY WAS GREAT--
--BUT OUR OPINIONS ON THE ELIXIR'S FUTURE DIVERGED.

IMMORTALITY, WE CONCLUDED, IS TOO DANGEROUS TO UNLEASH UPON THE WORLD. WE VOWED NEVER TO TOUCH IT.

BUT THEN ANASTASIA CAME INTO OUR LIVES


THE WHOLE VIENNA WAS AT HER FEET--
EDWIN BUKOVIC '91 ©

-- BUT SHE HAD CHOSEN US!

"LET THE BETTER MAN WIN," WE GENTLEMANLY AGREED

SEBASTIAN SUGGESTED THAT WE SEAL THE DEAL WITH A DROP OF HIS EXCELLENT AMONTILLADO

AND THE TURNCOAT WENT FIRST "TO SHOW THE WAY," HE SAID.
THIS WING WAS BEING BUILT THEN AND THE SCOUNDREL SAW THE CHANCE TO GET RID OF ME
-- BUT THE CROOK DIDN'T KNOW THAT I SECRETLY SIPPED OF THE ELIXIR!
THIS SUSTAINED ME ON MY WAY TO FREEDOM ALONG WITH THE THOUGHT OF THE --
GRUNT GRR!
-- REVENGE!
UM... BUT WHY ME? WHY NOT SEBASTIAN?
WHAT?
Y SEE HE DRANK OF THE ELIXIR, TOO!
AAH, THE PERFIDIOUS PAIZA-SITE! HE BREAKS HIS VOWS EASIER THAN EMPTY BOTTLES!

I'll TAKE YOU TO HIM... DON'T MIND THE MESS, WE ARE REDECORATING AT THE MOMENT
I'LL GO FIRST TO SHOW YOU THE W-
OH, NO!
I WON'T BE TRICKED TWICE! I'LL GO FIRST!
?
IT DIDN'T WORK, YOU SON OF A DOG'S SON! I'M NOT B--
--EAT GLOURB!!
©TIM BRUCKNER 1986

WHAT WAS ALL THAT NOISE?
DID WE WAKE YOU, FATHER?
HE CAME OUT JUST AS YOU SAID I TOOK CARE OF HIM!
ACH, THE VILLIAN! I KNEW HIS WORD MEANS LESS THAN A TOAD TO HIM!
HE SHOULD BE QUIET FOR A COUPLE OF CENTURIES NOW!
HUSH! HEAR THAT?
THE MUSIC? MINUET?
YES, BOCCHERINI'S
PITY YOUR MOTHER ALWAYS REFUSED THE ELIXIR. SHE WOULD'VE LIKED THIS!
THIS WAS OUR SONG!
EDVIN BALKOVIĆ & DARKO MACAN '91 ©
Fin

ragmop presents

the covert quartet

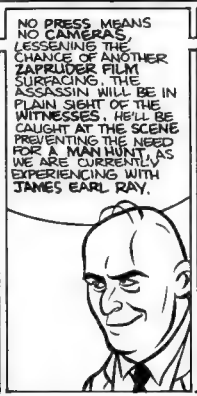
in

"Get Bobby!!"

© rob walton 1996

MR. DeMANN! THIS IS 1968, SIR. I'D THINK MY SELF LESS OF A WOMAN IF YOU DIDN'T.
WELL, EVERYONE, I'M PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT CALIFORNIA IS A 'GO'.
AS EXPECTED, THE SENATOR WILL WIN THE PRIMARY ON JUNE 5, GIVING HIS VICTORY SPEECH AT THE EMBASSY HOTEL.
INSTEAD OF EXITING THROUGH THE BALLROOM TO THE PRESS AREA, I'VE ARRANGED FOR THE SENATOR TO TAKE A DETOUR THROUGH THE PANTRY IN THE ADJOINING KITCHEN.
GORDO?

DOT AND THE SUBJECT WILL PRECEED US TO THE PANTRY. THE SMALL CONFINES OF THE PANTRY WILL ALLOW FOR A MORE CONTROLLED SITUATION. THE LAST THING WE WANT IS ANOTHER DALLAS.


NO PRESS MEANS NO CAMERAS, LESSENING THE CHANCE OF ANOTHER ZAPRUDER FILM SURFACING. THE ASSASSIN WILL BE IN PLAIN SIGHT OF THE WITNESSES. HE'LL BE CAUGHT AT THE SCENE PREVENTING THE NEED FOR A MAN HUNT, AS WE ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING WITH JAMES EARL RAY.

FRANCOIS WILL BE WORKING CRISIS MANAGEMENT WITH THE LAPD. HE'LL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURING THE AREA DURING AND AFTER THE ACTION. HE'LL MAKE SURE THE PHYSICAL EVIDENCE FITS THE FACTS OF THE ASSASSINATION AS WE WANT TO PRESENT IT TO THE PUBLIC.

THAT JUST LEAVES US WITH THE QUESTION OF THE SUBJECT.
WELL, DR. VON KRAUT?
I ASSURE YOU, HERR WALTER, THE SUBJECT IS READY TO GO.
THROUGH A SERIES OF HYPNO-THERAPY SESSIONS OF PAVLOVIAN MAGNITUDE, I HAVE CREATED THE FIRST TRUE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE.
BEHOLD!
THE FUTURE OF PERFECTLY PROGRAMMED POLITICAL ASSASSINS!
I AM ELMER J. FUDD, MILLIONAIRE. I OWN A MANSION AND A YACHT.
HEH, HEH! ADMITTEDLY THERE ARE STILL A FEW BUGS IN THE SYSTEM, BUT HE'LL BE READY, I'M SURE.
WHAT'S HE DOING?
AUTOMATIC WRITING. IT'S PART OF HIS CONDITIONING.
"GET BOBBY, GET BOBBY, GET BOBBY, JULIE ANDREWS WASN'T CAST IN MY FAIR LADY BECAUSE SHE WASN'T 'PRETTY ENOUGH.'"
SOME TRUTHS MUST BE TOLD.
HE ALSO DOTS HIS I'S WITH LITTLE HEARTS.
THAT I HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH.
WHO-EVER YOU ARE...
I HAVE ALWAYS RELIED ON THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS.
HE'LL BE READY, I PROMISE.

THE EMBASSY HOTEL: LOS ANGELES
JUNE 5, 1968, ROUND MIDNIGHT.
I'VE JUST BEEN SENT A MESSAGE THAT WE'VE BEEN HERE TOO LONG ALREADY.
MY THANKS TO ALL OF YOU. IT'S ON TO CHICAGO AND LET'S WIN THIS.
WE WON'T HAVE TO STEAL THE ELECTION FROM NIXON THIS YEAR!
LOS ANGELES
Embassy Hotel
BOBBY!
BOBBY!
BOBBY!
BOBBY!
SENATOR!
SENATOR!
BESIDES YOUR SUPPORT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, YOUR WAR AGAINST THE MAFIA, AND YOUR DESIRE TO BLOW WITH THE POLITICAL WIND...
I'M MOST IMPRESSED BY YOUR OUTSPOKEN DEFENCE OF HOLLYWOOD'S CASTING AUDREY HEPBURN IN MY FAIR LADY.

WELL, THERE'S NO COMPARISON, I MEAN, JULIE ANDREWS? WOOF! NOW, JACK AND I LOBBIED FOR MARILYN, OF COURSE, BUT...
WWWHAT?!
LIES!
POW! POW!
ALL LIES!
A HORSE!
MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE!

PLUNK!
PLUNK!
POW!
POW!
POW!
WE SHOT HIM! WE SHOT HIM!
WE SHOT THE SENATOR!
WHAT'S THIS? A WOMAN IN A POLKA-DOT DRESS SAYING SHE'S PARTY TO AN ASSASSINATION? SURELY I'M MISTAKEN. ONLY AN UNBALANCED, PUBLICITY SEEKING PERSON WOULD CLING TO SUCH A STORY.
TO PERSIST IN SO OBLIOUS A FABRICATION WOULD ONLY SHAME THE DEATH OF THE MAN SHE PURPORTS TO HAVE KILLED.
I SEE HASAAN AS SMALL, AND HELPLESS, PITIFULLY ILL, WITH A DEMENTED, PSYCHOTIC RAGE, OUT OF CONTROL OF HIS OWN CONSCIOUSNESS AND HIS OWN ACTIONS, SUBJECT TO SOME BIZARRE, DISASSOCIATED TRANCES...
BROK!
BROK!
BROK!
...IN SOME OF WHICH HE PROGRAMMED HIMSELF TO BE THE INSTRUMENT OF ASSASSINATION!
AND THIS IS THE DEFENCE!
COFFEE, TEA, OR ME?
NO THANK YOU.
I'M MEETING A FRIEND FOR BRUNCH.
THE DAILY PARROT
AGNEW REMEDY: "YOU'RE NO QUAYLE."
HERE YOU GO, MR. PRESIDENT.
FRESH EGGS.
BROK!
BROK!
BROK!
FLORENTINE?
BENEDICT!
THE END

HELLO THERE! AND WELCOME ONCE AGAIN TO THE FIRST INSTALLMENT OF...
...COMICS™ to BORE & CONFUSE YOU
by JESSE HAMM
I'M FENWICK... AND THIS IS MAW.
AND WE'RE HERE... TO BORE AND CONFUSE YOU!!!
AND NOW, A READING FROM THE NEW YORK TELEPHONE DIRECTORY.
SMITH, JOHN... 555-4239.
SMITH, JOHN... 555-6827.
SMITH, JOHN... 555-7578.
WHAT'S THIS? A SUDDEN SCENE CHANGE!
POSTERS
HOW UTTERLY CONFUSING!
QUICK, MAW! BORE THE READERS BY TELLING THEM WHAT HAPPENS NEXT!
NEXT, WE GET CRITIQUED BY AN EDITOR AT A RECENT CONVENTION!
SORRY, FELLAS... BUT THIS WORK IS REALLY DULL AND HARD TO FOLLOW...
NO PROFESSIONAL WOULD EVER DRAW COMICS THIS WAY.
1

DID YOU HEAR THAT, MAW? "NO PRO WOULD DRAW COMICS THIS WAY."
WE'VE JUST CORNERED THE MARKET ON A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY!
AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO WHAT, FENNIE?
TO BORE AND CONFUSE!!
THINK ABOUT IT, MAW...
PEOPLE MUST HAVE AN INHERENT NEED TO BE BORED AND CONFUSED!!
HOW ELSE CAN WE EXPLAIN TABLOIDS?!
OR EVEN TV?!
THEY MUST NEED TO BE BORED AND CONFUSED!!!
START THE PRESSES, WORLD! WE'RE HERE TO MEET THAT NEED!
AND LIKE THE EDITOR SAID, WE'RE BETTER AT IT THAN ANYONE!
PROLOGUE
2
GOOD IDEA, MAW, LABELING THE PROLOGUE AT ITS END INSTEAD OF ITS BEGINNING.
VERY CONFUSING!
THANKS, FENWICK. I COULDN'T AGREE MORE, FENWICK.
AND KEEP REPEATING MY NAME LIKE THAT, MAW!
I'LL GIVE THE READERS THEIR MONEYS WORTH OF BOREDOM.

GOODNESS ME, LOOK! IT'S TIME FOR TODAY'S SPECIAL STORY!
FENWICK, FENWICK, FENWICK, FENWICK, FENWICK
PREPARE YOURSELVES, FRIENDS!
IT'S A STORY OF CHARM AND INTRIGUE, INSIGHT AND TRUTH!
"BUT, FENWICK," YOU ASK...
"WHAT'S A STORY LIKE THAT DOING IN THIS COMIC?!"
...I'M CONFUSED!
MY PURPOSES ARE ONCE AGAIN FULFILLED!!!
MUUHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHA
THE END
A WORK OF PROGRESS. THE PROGRESS OF WORK.
IS IT THE BEGINNING?
IS IT THE END?
TOOLS CLANK OUT THE MINUTES...
SMOKE STACKS MARK OFF THE MILES.

WALLS.
SECURITY.
TUNNELS.
A FUTURE.
42
LOCKED IN.
DO WE CARE?
THIS WOMB WILL SUSTAIN US.
FACTORY of ARTS
"FACTORY of ARTS."
the NEXUS of the ART WORLD.
PORTRAITS MANUFACTURED BY the HUNDREDS.
ARTISTS FIND their PLACE IN LIFE.
their CAREERS are WON.
HERE, A SHAKING of HANDS.
HERE AGAIN, A FUTURE.
WELCOME TO the FACTORY of ARTS FAMILY!
EXCELLENT WORK, MY BOY! YOU'RE HIRED!
THANK YOU! THANK YOU VERY MUCH, MR. FALLSWORTH!

HERE, IT BEGINS...
YOU! ARTIST!
YES, MA'AM?
DO YOU PAINT PORTRAITS HERE?
WHY, YES!
AFTER, ALL...
THIS IS FACTORY OF ARTS!
OH YES! HOW SILLY OF ME!
NOW THEN, IF YOU WILL JUST HELP ME REMOVE THESE CLOTHES...
...WE MAY GET STARTED.
CLOTHES?
I'M--I'M SORRY, MA'AM, BUT WE JUST DON'T DO NUDES HERE!
"DON'T DO NUDES"? OH, DON'T BE SILLY!
I'M SORRY, MA'AM, BUT NUDES ARE SIMPLY AGAINST OUR POLICY!
POLICY!?
NOW I DO HOPE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE THIS DIFFICULT!
BUT--
PENELOPE, MY DEAR!
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE? MIGHT THE MAYOR WANT TO COMMISSION A PORTRAIT?
WHO, DADDY? OH NO, MR. FALLSWORTH--I WANTED ONE...
A NUDE, TO BE PRECISE.
A NUDE!
MY MY! MISS PENELOPE WOULD LOOK QUITE FETCHING AS A NUDE, EH PETER?
BUT, SIR!
YOU SAID THAT NUDES ARE STRICTLY AGAINST POLICY!

I DID..?
=LBF=
WELL--
I--
HE'S BEEN LIKE THAT SINCE I GOT HERE, MR. FALLSWORTH!!
WHY I-- I COULD JUST CRY.. -SNIF=/
PETER! LOOK WHAT A STATE YOU'VE PUT HER IN!
NOW PAINT THE PORTRAIT BEFORE I DO SOMETHING YOU'LL REGRET!
MR. FALLSWORTH...
IN THE NAME OF INTEGRITY..
...I MUST DECLINE!
INTEGRITY?!
BOY, THIS FACTORY HASN'T ROOM FOR ANY SUCH THING!
YOU'RE FIRED!
OUT!
AND TAKE THIS GARBAGE WITH YOU!!
YOU'LL NEVER WORK IN THIS TOWN AGAIN, PETER CLAY!
YOU'RE RUINED!

LATER...
RUINED.
ALL MY YEARS OF HARD WORK...
THROWN BACK IN MY FACE.
DO I START OVER IN ANOTHER FIELD?
NEVER.
I CAN'T EVEN SUCCEED AT WHAT I'M GOOD AT--HOW WILL I EVER SUCCEED AT ANYTHING ELSE?
OPEN WINDOW.
HM.
PROB'LY THE ONLY "DOOR" THAT LEADS ANYWHERE IN THIS TOWN.
LEADS STRAIGHT DOWN OF COURSE...
BUT THAT'S BETTER THAN NOTHIN'.
WELL, PETER...
TIME TO MEET YOUR MAKER.

WAIT A MINUTE! IF I EVEN HAVE A MAKER...
I COULD MEET HIM RIGHT NOW!
WHY WAIT TILL I'M DEAD TO MEET HIM?
AFTER ALL, HE MUST BE OMNISCIENT!
AND AN OMNISCIENT FRIEND COULD REALLY COME IN HANDY!
OH, HORSEFEATHERS, PETER! THERE'S NO SUCH PERSON!
LOOK AROUND YOU!
I SEE NOTHING TO SUGGEST SUCH A THI-
HUNH?
A DOVE AMONG THE PIGEONS!
HOW UTTERLY ODD!
IT MUST BE A SIGN OF SOME SORT!
SORRY, DOVE...
SNAB
BUT IF YOU ARE A SIGN FROM THE SUPREME BEING...
I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO EMBRACE YOU!

AND NOW...
A LETTER...
TO THE SUPREME BEING.
HMMM.
Dear Sir
Dear Sir,...
I have received the bird you sent, and I am very grateful.
It is the only divine thing I have,...
and therefore the only gift worthy of your reception;
so I am sending it back to you as a peace offering.
offering. Oh, and please give me a place in your majesty's service where I could do the most good.
Yours truly,
Peter Claver
YOU KNOW, DOVE, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE GETTING A JOB WHERE THE BOSS IS PERFECT AND HAS UNLIMITED FUNDS.
THE PAY MUST BE ADEQUATE, AND HYPOCRISY IS OUT!

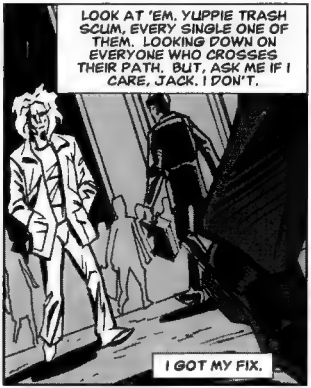
"SOME STRING..."
"A KNOT..."
"NOW, "SOME FOLDS..."
"AND..."
AWAY!
FUP
FUPFUP
AWAY INTO THE NIGHT, MY FRIEND!
AWAY... AND FIND THE MAKER!

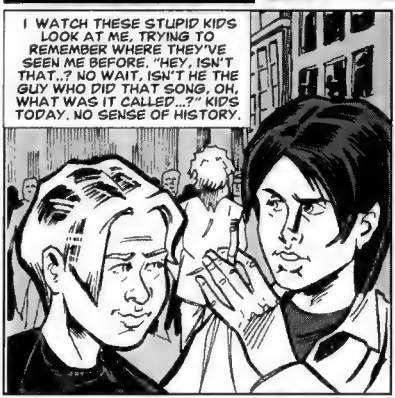
...YOU SEE, MAW, IT'S A BIT LIKE PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE
IF WE CAN PROVIDE THE READER WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ENLIGHTENING ENTERTAINMENT IN EACH ISSUE...
:MMCH-MRFL:
THEIR NEED TO BE BORED AND CONFUSED WILL NEVER FULLY BE SATISFIED,...
AND THEY WILL ALWAYS KEEP COMING BACK FOR MORE!!
NOT ONLY THAT, BUT--
WHAT'S THIS?
MAW! WE'RE STILL BEING READ! I THOUGHT WE ONLY BOUGHT A TEN-PAGE TIME-SLOT!
WE DID. BUT I SWEET-TALKED THE PUBLISHER INTO GIVING US AN EXTRA PAGE!
YOU FOOL!
NOW THEY'RE ALL ON TO OUR GRANDIOSE SCHEME!
WE'RE RUINED!
YAGITTA-YAGITTA-YAG
CHOKE CHOKE
W-W-WAIT..!
I THINK I KNOW HOW WE CAN STILL MAINTAIN OUR READERSHIP--
AND BORE THEM TO BOOT!
HOW, MAW?!
TELL ME!!
TELL ME QUICK!!
CONTINUED ON PAGE 1, PANEL 4...

FIX

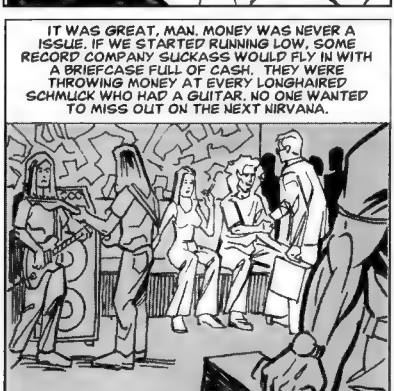
BY CHRIS KNOWLES

c. 1996


LOOK AT 'EM, YUPPIE TRASH SCUM, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM. LOOKING DOWN ON EVERYONE WHO CROSSES THEIR PATH. BUT, ASK ME IF I CARE, JACK. I DON'T.
I GOT MY FIX.


I WATCH THESE STUPID KIDS LOOK AT ME, TRYING TO REMEMBER WHERE THEY'VE SEEN ME BEFORE. "HEY, ISN'T THAT..? NO WAIT, ISN'T HE THE GUY WHO DID THAT SONG, OH, WHAT WAS IT CALLED..?" KIDS TODAY. NO SENSE OF HISTORY.

WE FIRST BROKE BIG IN '92 WHEN THE WHOLE GRUNGE THING EXPLODED. WE WEREN'T FROM SEATTLE, OF COURSE, BUT BACK THEN NOBODY CARED BUT THE CRITICS AND THE PURISTS.


IT WAS GREAT, MAN. MONEY WAS NEVER A ISSUE. IF WE STARTED RUNNING LOW, SOME RECORD COMPANY SUCKASS WOULD FLY IN WITH A BRIEFCASE FULL OF CASH. THEY WERE THROWING MONEY AT EVERY LONGHAIRED SCHMUCK WHO HAD A GUITAR. NO ONE WANTED TO MISS OUT ON THE NEXT NIRVANA.

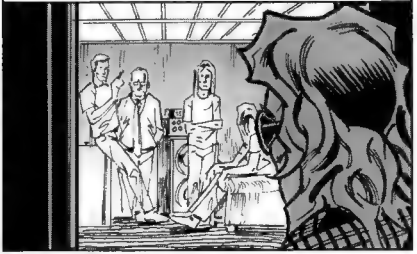
I STARTED RIDING THE WHITE HORSE IN WHAT, JULY? JUNE? OH SHIT, I DON'T KNOW. EVERYONE WAS DOING IT. I WAS MIXING IT WITH COKE SO I COULD KEEP IT UP, YOU KNOW? THE REAL HARDCORE GUYS, THEY JUST SHOT SOLO. THEY DIDN'T CARE ABOUT THE GROUPIES.

IT WAS A GREAT RIDE. THE FIRST RECORD WAS KIND OF A SLEEPER, BUT THE COMPANY STARTED PUSHING IT, AND WE ENDED UP WITH FIVE HIT SINGLES. THINGS WERE GOING GREAT. SOMEBODY TOLD ME KURT BLEW HIS BRAINS OUT. "SO WHAT?", I SAID.

SOME OTHERS STARTED DROPPING AT THE SAME TIME, BUT WHO WERE THEY? NOBODIES, ALSO-RANS. I WAS INVINCIBLE. SOME DICKHEAD CAME UP TO ME BACKSTAGE. HE SAYS YOU'RE USING, MAN. I CAN TELL. YOU BETTER GET CLEAN OR YOU'LL END UP LIKE KURT. SO I GO, "YEAH, WELL KURT WAS A FRIGGIN PUSSY, JACK. I ALMOST KICKED HIS ASS BACKSTAGE AT READING. KURT CHECKED OUT 'CAUSE HE WAS A LITTLE WEAKLING. HE COULDN'T TAKE THE PRESSURE. GOOD F-ING RIDDANCE".

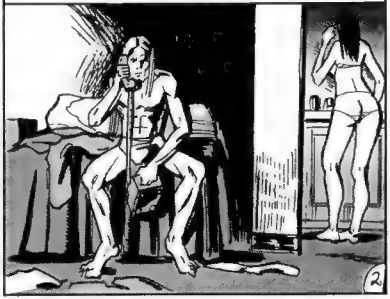
OF COURSE, OUR FOLLOWUP CROAKED BUT WHOSE DIDN'T? PEOPLE WERE SICK OF THE WHOLE GRUNGE THING AND EVERYBODY WAS USING ANYWAY . IT WAS A BIG COMEDOWN. WE WERE ON THE ROAD FOR TWO YEARS STRAIGHT AND WE WERE RUSHED RIGHT INTO THE STUDIO. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS, WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY SONGS. WE WROTE A BUNCH OF CRAP IN THE STUDIO AND PUT THE WHOLE MESS OUT LIKE A HAIL MARY PASS.

HALFWAY THROUGH OUR MISERABLE TOUR, THE BAND PULLS THIS TWELVE-STEP INTERVENTION CRAP. I GOT AMBUSHED AT REHEARSAL. THEY WERE LIKE,"WE THINK YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, MAN." I SAID,"OH REALLY? MAYBE THE PROBLEM IS THAT YOU CAN'T WRITE A DECENT RIFF TO SAVE YOUR ASS, ERIC. MAYBE 'DOWNER' TANKED CAUSE YOU GUYS DIDN'T HAVE ANY FRIGGING MATERIAL FOR ME TO WORK WITH, EVER THINK OF THAT? SO DON'T YOU GO SCAPEGOATING ME!



THEN JASON KINDA MUMBLED," WELL, IF YOU DONT CLEAN UP YOUR ACT, YOU'RE OUT OF THE BAND." I SAID, "HEY, GUY, THIS IS MY FUCKING BAND. I HIRED YOU OUT OF THAT CHEESY HAIR BAND. YOU'D STILL BE PLAYING JUNIOR PROMS IF NOT FOR ME." THEN I WALKED OUT.

LATER ON, THE DICKHEAD MANAGER CALLED ME. THE COMPANY SUITS WANTED ME OUT. THEY WERE GETTING PRESSURE FROM SOME PTA GRANNIES ABOUT MY LYRICS AND RUMORS OF "DRUG USE AMONG PROMINENT ROCK SINGERS". I TOLD HIM THEY COULD ALL GO & EAT SHIT.



THE FLATHEAD LANDLORD GETS ME AT THE DOOR. "YOU THREE MONTH LATE, YOU THREE MONTH LATE! WHERE YOU MONEY, MR. BIG ROCK STAR?" I TOLD HIM MY CHECK IS COMING TOMORROW. "NO, YOU PAY NOW. YOU PAY NOW!" SO I SAID, "WHY DONT YOU LEARN HOW TO SPEAK ENGLISH, ASSHOLE. TRY AND EVICT ME." THAT SHUT HIM UP.

SO I GET IN AND THE BITCH HAS LEFT A MESSAGE ON THE MACHINE. SHE'S SCREAMING AND CRYING, SAYING WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU? SHE SAYS THE KID SWALLOWED A BOTTLE CAP AND SHE NEEDS AN OPERATION. SO WHAT AM I, A DOCTOR? ANYWAY, WHO TOLD HER TO HAVE THAT STUPID KID IN THE FIRST PLACE? JESUS, HALF OF MY MONTHLY ROYALTY CHECK GETS EATEN BY HER ALREADY, WHAT THE HELL IS SHE EATING BOTTLE CAPS FOR?

I PULL THE PLUG ON THE DAMN MACHINE. I SHUT THE CURTAIN, PUT A LOCK ON THE DOOR, AND GET OUT MY WORKS.

THE WORLD SHUTS IT'S MOUTH FOR AWHILE.

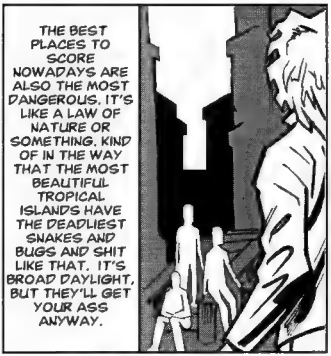
I WAKE UP AND MY HEAD IS POUNDING. I CHECK MY STASH. IT'S SPENT. WELL, FUCK IT. I GET MY ROYALTY CHECK TODAY. I WAS SUPPOSED TO REHEARSE WITH THESE BONEHEADS FROM QUEENS, BUT I CAN'T TAKE THE NOISE TODAY. I'LL CALL THEM LATER. MAYBE.

I TAKE THE SUBWAY UPTOWN TO PICK UP THE MONEY. WHERE I LIVE KIDS HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN POP OPEN MAILBOXES AND HELP THEMSELVES TO YOUR F-ING MAIL. WHEN IS SOMEONE GOING TO DROP A BOMB ON THIS SHITHOLE CITY ALREADY?

THE MIDDLE-AGED BITCH MAKES ME WAIT IN THE FRIGGING MAILROOM FOR MY CHECK. JESUS! THAT'S A NEW ONE! I DON'T CARE. THE MAIL GUYS LOOK AT ME KINDA WEIRD. FUCK YOU TOO, JOSE.

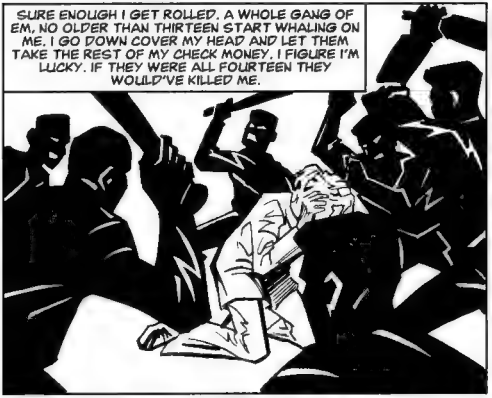
I GET THE CHECK, BUT IT'S LIKE HALF THE AMOUNT IT WAS LAST TIME. I'M LIKE, WHAT'S UP WITH THIS SHIT? THE SUIT'S LIKE, "SORRY, MAN, THE RECORD'S NOT DOING WELL AS A SHELF ITEM." SO I SAID, "YEAH, WELL YOU'LL HEAR FROM MY LAWYER, JACK."

THE FIRST PROBLEM IS, I DONT HAVE A LAWYER. THE SECOND IS, THE SUIT KNOWS IT.


THE BEST PLACES TO SCORE NOWADAYS ARE ALSO THE MOST DANGEROUS. IT'S LIKE A LAW OF NATURE OR SOMETHING. KIND OF IN THE WAY THAT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL TROPICAL ISLANDS HAVE THE DEADLIEST SNAKES AND BUGS AND SHIT LIKE THAT. IT'S BROAD DAYLIGHT, BUT THEY'LL GET YOUR ASS ANYWAY.

MY CONNECTION CALLS HIMSELF THE JAZZ SINGER. THE GUY CAN'T SING A FRIGGING NOTE, BUT HE CALLS HIMSELF THAT ALL THE SAME. HE GETS HIS JUNK FROM THE COLUMBIANS. PURE AS HELL. THE JAZZ SINGER TELLS ME TO BE CAREFUL. THE HOMIES OUTSIDE KNOW WHY I AM HERE.

I TELL HIM I TOOK PRECAUTIONS.


SURE ENOUGH I GET ROLLED. A WHOLE GANG OF EM, NO OLDER THAN THIRTEEN START WHALING ON ME. I GO DOWN COVER MY HEAD AND LET THEM TAKE THE REST OF MY CHECK MONEY. I FIGURE I'M LUCKY. IF THEY WERE ALL FOURTEEN THEY WOULD'VE KILLED ME.

HA, ROOKIES! DONT KNOW THE ROPES YET. THEY DIDN'T STOP TO NOTICE THAT I WAS WALKING A LITTLE FUNNY.

I GET ON THE SUBWAY, BEAT TO SHIT. SURE ENOUGH, I'LL GET EVICTED. WHAT CAN I DO? NOTHING.

SOME LITTLE TEENIES ARE STARING AT ME. DO THEY RECOGNIZE ME? OR DO I JUST LOOK SO SHITTY THAT THEY FEEL SORRY FOR ME? I COULD CARE LESS EITHER WAY.

I GOT MY FIX.

Carla Allison in STEPS
McCrea/P.Holden 4-2-90

ONE MORNING.
C'MON, C'MON, WHERE ARE YOU?
OUT OF ORDER
FIGURES.
BETTER TAKE THE STAIRS.

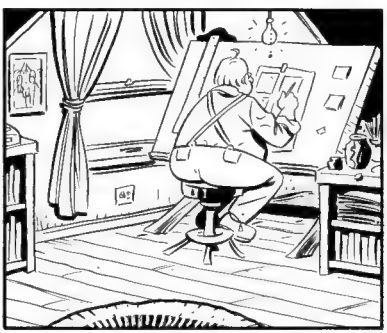
YO, TAXI!

An Afternoon With Mr. Drawing Board Belly

It's time for another visit to the modest home of Mr and Mrs Drawing Board Belly on the corner of Elm and Cherry Street, U.S.A.!

Look, Mrs Drawing Board Belly is waiting for us! "Go right on up," she says We've been here many times before.

Atop the formidable stairs we find Mr Drawing Board Belly's comfortable attic **studio** Let's go in, shall we?



We're in **luck**! Mr. Drawing Board Belly is going **full steam** on another classic tale Let's not betray our presence just yet Perhaps we can catch a glimpse of the **master** at work!

Oh, boy! It's ***Pugs & Tickle***, in yet another lighthearted adventure! I guess America will never tire of those two playpen cut-ups

We shouldn't bother him while he works We'll occupy ourselves by taking a look around the studio Not much has changed!

Artists are called on to draw **many** different things Mr. Drawing Board Belly has an extensive **reference file** -- but who has time for **details**?!

Look at all of Mr Drawing Board Belly's comics! These are just **some** of the comics he's drawn. He's so busy drawing **new** ones, he doesn't have time to sort these out, either.

Wait -- it looks like Mr Drawing Board Belly has **another** great idea! Has sweet **inspiration** struck again? **Where** will the pencil lead him?

Ha-ha! Just think -- we get to see this **months** before the rest of the world What a **privilege**!

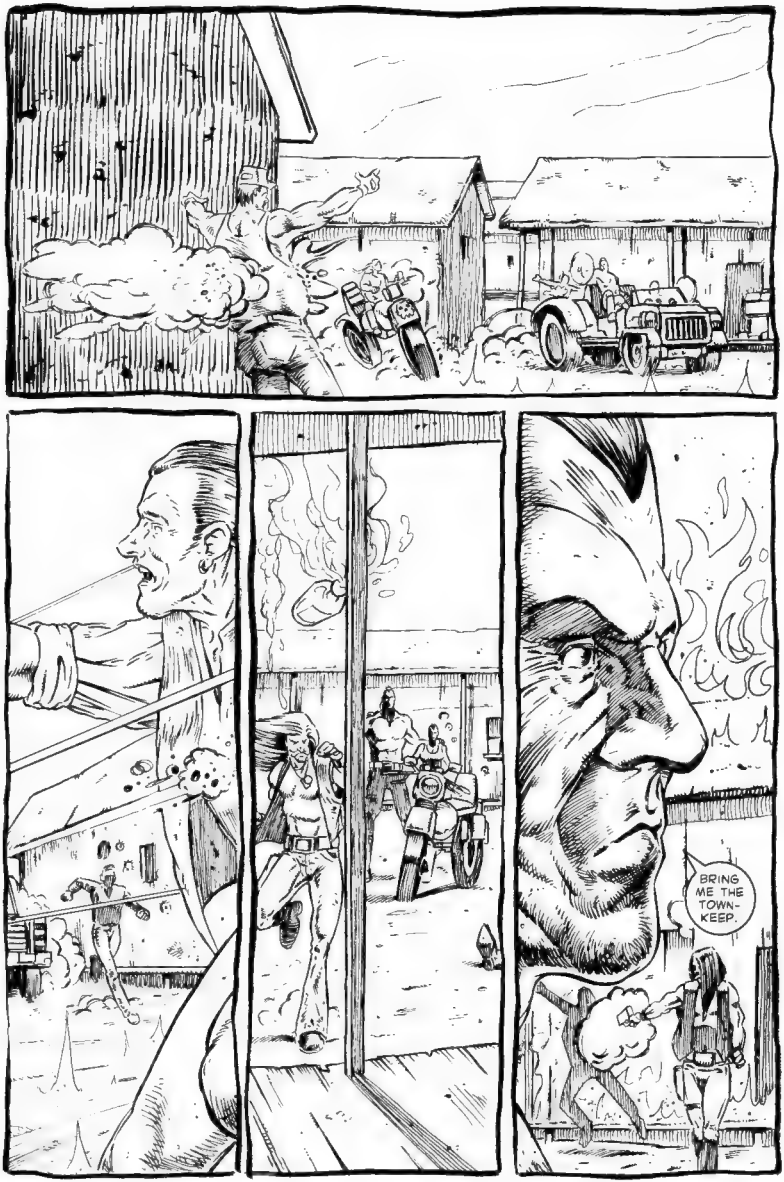
Another **deadline** has been met "I sure could use some milk and cookies right about now," says Mr. Drawing Board Belly "And I bet **you** could, too!"

The End

OH NO--
THE BRUTALIZERS
ARE COMING.

THE BRUTALIZERS

Part Four: MASSACRE AT WEST COVE


BRING ME THE TOWN-KEEP.

NO! --PLEASE HELP ME!
NO!! --NO!!!
PLEASE!! PLEASE!!-- DON'T KILL ME!!
SILENCE.
YOU PEOPLE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF MY MEN--YOU MUST BE PUNISHED.

IT WASN'T US!!--IT WASN'T OUR FAULT!
Ka-BOOM!
Ka-BOOM!
LEAVE THESE PEOPLE ALONE--IT'S ME YOU WANT.
YOU KNOW SOMETHING?--YOU'RE RIGHT...
BOYS... KILL HIM.

Ka-BOOM!
Fa-KOOM!
BOOM!
CHOOM!
Fa-
CHOOM!
Ka-BOOM!
Fa-KOOM!
AAHHH...UTT...
POOM!
End of Part Four
Next: "THE PRESERVERS"

LETTERS

Internet: 72164.1134@CompuServe P.O. Box 893 Acworth,GA 30101

Andrew M. Ford
creator of RIB
amf@servtech.com

Joe,

I just got my hands on NB #37, and I wanted to let you know what I thought of it.

"Dusty Star": Robinson did a wonderful job on the art (his cover this issue was great, too; very eye catching), and your story was very entertaining. I must say, though, that I would have liked to see the whole thing stretched into a few more pages. Will we be seeing "Dusty Star" again? I hope so!

"Mr. Mamoulian": Being an avid reader myself, I found this issue's installment of Bolland's classic strip quite enjoyable. It's nice to have a feature like this to look forward to each issue.

"The Thirst": The art was pretty good in this one, but the story just didn't do it for me. Maybe this is just another one that could have used a few more pages, but I found the whole vampire thing to be very cliche (if you are going to do a vampire story, you gotta come up with something more original than this, I learned that while working on Brainstorm's VAMPEROTICA title) and the ending seemed kinda unrealistic. Oh well, just my opinion.

"Morgen": What can I say, another beautiful and brilliant piece, by Russell. I just wish it could have been longer than one page.

"The Wretch": I loved this one. Very experimental, very entertaining, very cool. Bravo, Phillip Hester...keep it coming!

"Alan Moore's Songbook": This installment of the Moore's book of songs was kinda creepy. I mean, when read alone, the words are very unassuming, but combined with that art of Ricketts, it becomes very twisted and strange. I'm not saying thumbs down; on the contrary, I found it very thought-provoking. It's just a very weird piece...good, but weird.

"Iron Empires": This one did absolutely nothing for me. The art was very muddy, and the story was very loose throughout. I hear lots of great things about this series, though, so I guess I'll wait until I've read the first three chapters until I pass judgement.

"Mr. Murray": This one was kinda surreal and silly at the same time. The ending was kinda flat, but I'm interested in seeing more of Ian Carrey's work. Is he a semi-regular contributor, or anything?

"Better Living Through Chemistry": First off, Brian really hyped me up on this one before it came out, so I had very high expectations. The art (as always, from Brian) was terrific. Unfortunately, the story never really hooked me. I know, I know, it's Warren Ellis. What can I say, this one just didn't hit home. The story is about everyone living in a drug induced state, set forth by the powers that be, and I'm not a very big fan of this kind of thing. It's too easy to write a meandering, stream on consciousness kind of thing, and pass it off as a "drug piece". I know how popular this writer is, and I myself have found myself enjoying his work from time to time. I guess this one's just not my cup of tea. I must add, though, that the ending was quite clever.

"Carla Allison": This one really made me smile. Maybe it's just me, but I didn't see that ending coming like it did. Good show!

"Ship of Fools": I could really go off on this one, but I'll keep it simple: Too much meaningless violence, not enough substance. Nuff said.

"Sketchbook": Wow, this was wonderful. I am a big fan of Doran's work, and it was a real treat to see some of her beautifully rendered pencils. I especially enjoyed the two headshots on page three of her contribution.

"Mood Swing": I know you like to end issues of NB with these one page strips, but is this really necessary? Don't get me wrong, some of the strips from the past have been very good. I just hate to see such a fine issue of this anthology end of such a confusing and somewhat pointless note. Oh well, maybe it's just me...yeah, I'm pretty sure it's me.

Well, another issue of NB has come and gone, and I for one am a little bit more enlightened and a heck of a lot more entertained than I was before picking it up. It's great to see a title like this last for as long as it has. Here's looking forward to another 37 issues. Until next time. . .

Olav Beemer
Zeist, The Netherlands

Dear Joe,

After a disappointing issue, I'm glad to inform you that NEGATIVE BURN #37 did live up to its usual level of quality, diversity and entertainment again. Of the thirteen featured short stories, poems or sketchbook features, I have really enjoyed ten, liked one other and only was disappointed by two. Now scores like that remind me of those incredible issues of half a year ago, when each new month

carried with it a totally entertaining mixed bag of great short stories again, and that's a good sign, really. Let's look a little closer at a few of this issue's highlights, then, and see what I have to say about them.

"Dusty Star" still is a brilliant way to open up an issue. It has been done once before and together with Andrew Robinson you again deliver one of the most inviting, entertaining and funny stories of the whole issue. The storytelling is fresh and original, the computer used during a game of poker being a lovely touch, while the artwork is so alive and inspiring that it tickles my fancy to no end. You must show more of Andrew's art in these pages, I tell you, for he's too good an artist to let go.

"Mr. Mamoulian" was hilarious– that indeed must have been a really, really good book our main anti-hero was reading there!

Totally different yet equally good was "The Thirst" by Darko Macan and Edvin Biuković, the team whose work on GRENDEL TALES has been able to thrill me from beginning to end. This peek at four pages of their older work in the late eighties turned out to be very clever in terms of story and highly powerful in terms of artwork. Perhaps future issues will show some recent work of these two?

"The Wretch," formerly the Creep, actually was off-beat enough a feature to have me enjoy this tale more than most of Phillip Hester's previous stories about this very same main character of his upcoming regular series. Perceptions differ, even if everybody you ask has seen the same accident, so seeing a couple of everyday people give their opinions as to what the ever-mysterious Wretch is, was very amusing. You know, the name of that first girl in the tale– definitely sounds very Dutch to me.

"Iron Empires" continues to be an entertaining and surprising story, with original main characters experiencing some of the weirdest things they've ever seen against a very intriguing background. It will be interesting to see how this multi-part tale will shape up.

After that, "Better Living Through Chemistry" was by far the most shocking and chilling tale of the issue, featuring the edge-of-your-seat storytelling from Warren Ellis and Brian Michael Bendis' realistic artwork. These horror-mysteries of Ellis certainly are gaining my interest. First in CALIBRATIONS, now here– and I'm beginning to enjoy them more and more.

"Carla Allison" was another surprise feature, as this gave the readers the privilege of a sneak peek at some of John McCrea's early work. Made in the same year as Macan and Biuković's piece of work earlier in this issue, it's interesting to see how John's artwork has evolved over the years. While the tale itself wasn't all that fantastic, I still got a good kick out of seeing his artwork from seven years ago.

So, having covered the most entertaining short stories of NEGATIVE BURN #37, I think it's safe to say now that last issue's disappointment was a one-time event only, and not something structural. That having said, it should come as no surprise when I say I'm looking forward to the next issue already!

You can look forward to seeing more work from the team of Macan-Biukovic' in the issues to come as I'll be presenting quite a few of their earlier short stories which have never seen print over here before. It's neat to watch their talent mature and develop, as you'll soon see for yourself.

Edward Douglas
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You can never go wrong by opening up with a "Dusty Star" story and cover, and it sure seems like its been awhile since the last one. (Where is that series you promised? <G>) I think that I've figured out why I like Andrew Robinson's art so much...because it reminds me of Jamie Hewlett and Dusty reminds me of a Western-version of Tank Girl. This story wasn't as good as the last one, though, and was a bit of a one-joker.

The "Mr. Mamoulian" strip was a strange one, although it was also one of the funnier ones. Aren't you running out of these strips yet?

Ooo...nice! You got the Croatian wonders to do a story for NEGATIVE BURN! Unfortunately, "The Thirst" was a typical high concept short story...a thirsting vampire runs into a thirsting wino. Oh, wait a dad-blasted second...this is dated 1989! Biuković's artwork has improved greatly since this was done, and I imagine that they'll fare better on KILROY than they do here.

Another P. Craig Russell adaptation follows, as beautiful as his work usually is. Lovely poem, as well.

Seeing "The Wretch" story reminded me that I haven't yet sat down to read the first issue of that series yet...d'oh! This probably would have been a more interesting story if something similar hadn't been done in THE FACTOR a few months back, but I liked seeing the residents of Glass City trying to guess who The Wretch is. This was as fun and entertaining of all the other...er...Wretch appearances in NEGATIVE BURN, and I can't wait to find the time to read the first issue of his series.

I didn't think too much of "Town of Lights" the song, but I really liked what Mark Ricketts did with what he had to work with; very funny stuff. Ricketts is probably one of the most underrated artist at Caliber.

I've been enjoying "Iron Empires" and this is no exception (although I still like Chris' painted work more than his line art). I like the fact that this focuses on a smaller group of characters than SHADOW EMPIRES, but I'm curious to where this falls into place with the story that he began in

DARK HORSE PRESENTS? (These are the same characters, aren't they?) I like how this story is developing quite a bit and I can't wait for the next installment.

"Mr. Murray" was absolutely hilarious and probably one of the weirdest things I've read since the last issue of EIGHTBALL. Who is this Ian Carney guy anyway? I hope that we can expect some more "Mr. Murray" stories sometime in the future; he's almost as pathetic as "Mr. Mamoulian"! I liked this so much that I read through it twice and found it even funnier the second time! Of course, Dave Taylor is the artist on BATMAN: SHADOW OF THE BAT, but this is very different than his work over there; this had the look and feel of that old comic strip LIL' NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND (I mean, who else could that little guy in the corner of every panel be?) Another pleasant surprise from the pages of NEGATIVE BURN.

And now...the moment of truth..."Better Living Through Chemistry"! Wow... can't believe that two of my favorite creators worked together on this story dealing with drug testing on ordinary citizens, but this has got to be one of the strangest stories Warren has even written as well as one of the most powerful. It took me two readings to follow the flow of the story, and I was in fear that my brain would explode or some government blokes would come for me by the end of the second reading. As it were, this was some of Warren's finest work as a writer, and Brian Michael Bendis' art—while not as inventive as his JINX work—was perfect for the story!

Hey, it's HITMAN's John McCrea! There didn't seem to be much point to "Carla Allison in Flowers" but the art was really nice (and fairly amusing). I would think that this was one of those things that artists do when they're bored.

"Ship of Fools" returns for another short, "Doin' Time", that has something to do with Shiro's inability to tell time or something. This wasn't as clear as the other stories about the characters I've read, and Michael's art looked a bit rushed. I'm still a bit mixed on this series, and I'll have to read a few more issues before I know if I like it or not.

Colleen Doran's lovely art reproduced well in the "Sketchbook" and "Mood Swings" wrapped up the issue on another weird note.

Overall, this was probably one of the stranger issues of NEGATIVE BURN if not the strangest, and there were a lot of great stories. My favorites were "Better Living Through Chemistry" and the "Mr. Murray" strip...fun stuff! (As was "The Wretch" strip.)

And now, I'm off to do some of my own writing.

Ian Carney is also writing a new series available through Slave Labor (sorry, but I can't remember the title right off). If you like his stuff here you should check out his new series.

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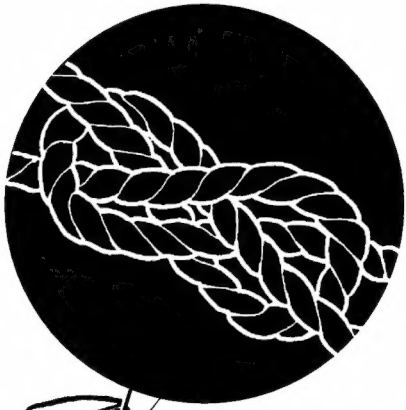

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